

VZCZCXYZ0000
OO RUEHWEB

DE RUEHQT #0643/01 0791204
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 201204Z MAR 07
FM AMEMBASSY QUITO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6584
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RHMFISS/HQ USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL PRIORITY
INFO RUEHBO/AMEMBASSY BOGOTA IMMEDIATE 6536
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ MAR 0500
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA IMMEDIATE 1514
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS IMMEDIATE 2449
RUEHGL/AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL IMMEDIATE 2069

UNCLAS QUITO 000643

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

REFTEL: QUITO 00420, QUITO 00537, QUITO 554, QUITO 556, QUITO 587

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PINR](#) [PGOV](#) [EC](#) [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [MASS](#)

SUBJECT: Mission Actions To Counter "No Bases" Conference

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The International Network for the Abolition of Foreign Military Bases (INAFMB) held their international conference in Ecuador March 5-9. An estimated 400 foreign activists from 40 nations attended meetings and rallies in Quito and Manta (site of the U.S. Forward Operating Location - FOL). While neither President Correa nor any other Ecuadorian cabinet-level minister attended conference events, INAFMB representatives met with Correa in his office, and the undersecretary for defense reaffirmed the GOE's intent not to renew the FOL agreement in remarks at the opening ceremony. The Embassy countered the conference's misinformation campaign with an aggressive information outreach strategy and private diplomacy aimed at key GOE and City of Manta officials. In the end, the INAFMB conference was overshadowed by the ongoing institutional impasse between Ecuador's electoral body and its Congress, and our media efforts generated positive press coverage of the FOL and its mission. End Summary.

Background: "No-Bases" Conference

¶2. (SBU) An estimated 400 international activists from over 40 nations arrived in Ecuador for the International Network for the Abolition of Foreign Military Bases' March 5-9 conference. The INAFMB Ecuador conference sought to highlight the "political, social, economic, and environmental impact of foreign military bases and the grassroots movements dedicated to opposing their existence," the organization affirmed in event literature. The INAFMB website (www.no-bases.net) notes that the organization was formed in 2003 to connect various anti-bases movements around the world. The network through its global activism hopes to reduce what it views as rising "militarization" and use of "force" around the world with the aim of encouraging a "lasting and just system of peace." The organization appears to be non-violent in nature.

Private Diplomacy

3.(SBU) Prior to the "No-Bases" conference, the Ambassador met with Minister of Defense Lorena Escobar (reftel), Quito Mayor Paco Montayno, and Security Advisor to Correa Fernando Bustamante to exchange views on the upcoming conference and to discuss the importance of the FOL in the regional anti-narcotics fight. The PAO and PolOffs also met with conference attendees from the American Friends Service Committee and the Washington Office on Latin America to discuss the role of the FOL in Ecuador. The activists asked Embassy officials to respond to a series of allegations by conference participants including that the FOL is part of Plan Colombia, used to launch aerial fumigations planes in Colombia, and had had a negative social and environmental impact on the City of Manta. Embassy officers explained the limited scope of the FOL based on the 1999 agreement between the U.S. and Ecuador, and noted

that the FOL is an important tool in combating regional narcotics trafficking. Officers repeatedly noted that the FOL is not a U.S. military base, but rather a small operation located on the Ecuadorian Eloy Alfaro Airbase, and explained that, to the contrary of having a negative social or environmental impact, it has been actively engaged in community improvement projects and confers a significant, positive economic impact in Manta. While the group remained skeptical, they thanked Embassy officials for taking the time to meet and provide the USG perspective. The WOLA representative mentioned she is writing an article on the FOL to be published soon.

¶4. (SBU) In a March 7 meeting with CG and PolChief, Manta mayor Jorge Zambrano expressed more support than he has previously for the presence of the FOL, and suggested the USG continue efforts to educate the Ecuadorian public to the benefits of the FOL. CG expressed appreciation for Zambrano's recent public statements extolling the benefits of the FOL to Manta and the nation, and inquired about the mayor's views on a possible local referendum on the FOL. Zambrano said the local political consensus was in favor of a referendum, but he agreed with Embassy concerns that if proposed to national electoral authorities, the Correa government might try to convert the measure into a national referendum, leading to likely failure of the measure. Zambrano also expressed concern that if held locally, the costs of the referendum would come out of his budget. (Those costs are estimated at \$80,000.) While some advocate holding the referendum concurrently with the April 15 referendum on the national constituent assembly, Zambrano said it would be preferable to hold the local referendum on the FOL separately. In any case, he said, the earliest practical time to hold a local referendum would be on the date for elections to the assembly, if approved, in August/September. Zambrano suggested that local support for the FOL was strong, but much ignorance still exists about it, even among Manta residents. Turning to the issue of upgrading the Manta airport to international status, the CG explained to Zambrano that we believe the FOL could easily coexist with and in fact support an international airport, made possible by USG investment in creating the best runway in South America. Zambrano agreed, and suggested that the USG consider contributing radar to the airport which would benefit both military and civilian users.

GOE Reaffirms Non-Renewal, But Stays Clear of Conference

¶5. (SBU) Members of the "No-Bases Coalition of Ecuador" and the INAFMB met with Correa and Foreign Minister Maria Fernanda Espinosa in Correa's office on March 8. According to the INAFMB and press reports, Correa reaffirmed his position not to renew the FOL agreement after its 2009 expiry date. Although Correa and Escudero were invited to participate in the INAFMB conference inauguration, both declined. Escudero instead sent Undersecretary of Defense Miguel Carvajal, who also reaffirmed the GOE position not to renew the agreement after 2009, calling it a matter of national security (reftel). Quito Mayor Paco Moncayo welcomed the group not to associate himself with its cause but because he viewed the large international delegation as an opportunity to promote Quito touristically. Moncayo, a retired Ecuadorian general, stressed the importance of a "civilian" debate over national security matters, and lamented the lack of civilian security experts in Ecuador. National Security Advisor to Correa, Fernando Bustamante, represented Correa at conference events held in Manta on March 9.

ORGANIZERS SPREAD MISINFORMATION ABOUT U.S. BASES

¶6. (U) Meeting organizers engaged in aggressive media outreach that included interviews with two national television and four national radio chains. Media dedicated almost daily coverage to the event, but not as prominently as we had feared. The concept of "735 U.S. bases around the world" was a recurring theme of their press materials. Their message also centered on misinformation including the idea that U.S. bases allowed the USG to control water and oil resources worldwide, contributed to pollution and environmental degradation and were the cause of alarming increases in prostitution in communities where they are located.

EMBASSY EFFORTS TO COUNTER MISINFORMATION

¶17. (U) The Embassy used State/IIP products, Southcom fact sheets regarding global security priorities, and locally produced materials to dispel the misinformation circulated by the conference organizers. Post personally discussed the materials with journalists as a way to provide balance to reporting on the No Bases conference. The majority of national newspapers who covered the event included Embassy-originated information as part of their reporting. Our explanation that there are 34 U.S. overseas bases in countries such as Korea, Japan and Spain, not 735 bases, and that U.S. security alliances with these and many other countries (including Ecuador) help ensure global security and stability, helped temper the organizers' notion that the USG was imposing its security agenda on other countries via its overseas bases. DCM, Consul General, PAO, DAO and IO conducted on-the-record interviews with national and regional news outlets prior to and during the conference to underscore USG points. Five national radio stations, three national newspapers and regional television stations broadcast these interviews from March 5-8.

¶18. (U) PAS organized FOL tours for TV stations whose broadcasts coincided with the conference. A four-part series entitled, "Positive Action in the Manta FOL" was broadcast by the country's largest television network, TC Television. The series focused on the threat of narcotrafficking in the region and the positive economic and social impact of FOL personnel in the Manta community. Following the conference, PAS welcomed some of the country's most widely recognized news anchors from Ecuavisa, the country's second-largest network, to the FOL for a full day of interviews and briefings to underscore its counter narcotics mission and dispel the misinformation that the USG conducted subversive or armed operations from Manta.

Embassy to Continue Information Campaign

¶19. (SBU) Over the next year, the Mission will continue its campaign to inform Ecuadorian opinion shapers and the general public about the FOL and the benefits of U.S.-Ecuador counter-narcotics cooperation via private and public diplomacy, and FOL visits. We also are requesting separate funding from the Department and DOD for paid media placements to inform the public about the FOL, and for an enhanced Manta community relations campaign to increase support for the FOL in key constituencies in and around Manta.

Comment

¶10. (SBU) The "No-Bases" conference presented the Mission with excellent opportunities to educate the GOE and the Ecuadorian and international media about the exclusive counter-narcotics mission and positive results of the FOL. The Ambassador's meetings with the new Defense Minister and the president's security advisor provided them with the USG perspective on how the FOL benefits Ecuador and protects its sovereignty. By shining a light on the FOL, the conference may even have inadvertently helped us capture the attention of undecided and uninformed observers and to absorb a balanced review of the facts. The Mission's extensive media outreach efforts, including media visits to the FOL and radio and TV interviews, exposed millions of Ecuadorians to the USG perspective on the FOL and bilateral counter-narcotics cooperation and countered the organizers' anti-FOL propaganda.

JEWELL